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ABSTRACT

A discussion of the translation of fiction focuses on metaphors in the speech of characters. Illustrations are drawn from an Afrikaans novel, "Fiela se kind" ("Fiela's Child"), translated into English by its author, Dalene Matthee. It is argued that if the interdependence of the intratextual components of narrative texts is not taken into account in translation of metaphorical expressions, characters can be altered substantially. An adapted model for translation quality assessment and structural models of narratology are proposed for making contrastive analyses of the same character in the source- and target-language texts. In the analysis performed in this paper, the role of metaphorical expressions is examined first and a theoretical framework and terminology for their analysis and interpretation are then outlined. Finally, specific translation examples are discussed. It is concluded that inadequate translation of idiosyncratic metaphors has both semantic and communicative implications for the target-language text, causing it to lack the semantic density of the source text and to lose meaning. This method of analysis is suggested for translator training, particularly in relation to translation of fictional characters' speech. A 21-item bibliography is included. (MSE)

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TRANSLATING METAPHORS FUNCTIONING AS CHARACTERISATION TECHNIQUES IN NARRATIVE FICTION

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ABSTRACT

Translation students should be taught to take into account the interdependence of intratextual components in novels, especially when translating idiosyncratic metaphorical expressions that function as characterisation techniques. Failure to do so can turn the target text characters into mutants of those in the source text. This also affects the evaluation of the translation.

TRANSLATING METAPHORS FUNCTIONING AS CHARACTERISATION TECHNIQUES IN NARRATIVE FICTION

1. INTRODUCTION

The metaphors discussed in this paper are employed as fundamental characterisation techniques in the award-winning Afrikaans novel, Fiela se kind [= Fiela's child] by Dalene Matthee (1985), which has been translated into English by the author herself.

The problem posed is that if the interdependence of the intratextual components of narrative texts (as assumed in a semiotic-structuralist approach) is not taken into account in the translation of metaphorical expressions, the target text characters can become deviant mutants of the characters in the source text. This has important implications for the translated text as such, for the teaching of literary translation and for the evaluation of translated works of literature (Kruger 1990).

The translation of metaphorical expressions in the speech of characters has to be preceded by an in-depth analysis and interpretation of the narrative text. To this end an adaptation of Juliane House's model for translation quality assessment can be used (House 1981)[1] and cognizance taken of structuralist models of narratology.[2] In this way metaphorical expression can be studied in its interdependence with the other components of the narrative text which also determine characterisation, such as focalisation. A contrastive analysis can then be conducted by comparing profiles of the same source text and target text character to determine

whether the author's inability to translate the metaphorical expressions in her novel has resulted in an unfaithful portrayal of the characters in the target text.

In order to investigate the translation of metaphorical expressions, it is necessary to utilize metaphor theory, in particular the interaction theory of metaphor,[3] as developed and refined by Rheinhart (1976) and Gräbe (1984, 1985).[4] By making use of Gräbe's (1984, 1985) framework and terminology for the analysis of local and global interaction processes in poetic metaphor, translation students can be helped to appreciate that a global (i.e. textual) rather than a merely local (i.e. syntactic) analysis of the interaction processes in complex literary metaphorical expressions is imperative for the interpretation, the translation, and consequently the evaluation of the narrative text (Kruger 1990).

2. IDIOSYNCRATIC METAPHORICAL EXPRESSIONS IN NARRATIVE FICTION

In a narrative text, a character's speech, whether in conversation or as a silent activity of the mind, implicitly indicates certain character traits (Bal 1978, Rimmon-Kenan 1983). For this reason, speech is used as a characterisation technique by many novelists. This is also the case in Fiela se kind [= Fiela's child].

Fiela se kind forms part of South African author Dalene Matthee's 'forest' novels which are set in the Cape Colony during the period 1860 to 1889 and which depict the destruction of the Knysna forest and its elephants, as well as the exploitation of

uneducated woodcutters by the English timber merchants. However, in Fiela se kind different language forms are used to portray the words and thoughts of different character groups: English and Standard Afrikaans for 'educated' people and an imitation of the last century's Kitchen Dutch, resulting in an idiosyncratic form of present-day Afrikaans, for the 'uneducated'. For the purposes of this paper, the metaphorical expressions which manifest themselves in stylised, non-standard forms of speech as characterisation techniques in Fiela se kind, can be termed 'idiosyncratic'. The translator's challenge therefore lies in maintaining the striking idiolectal differentiation between the characters by means of the idiosyncratic metaphorical expressions in their speech.

Although the title of this novel is Fiela se kind, the central figure is Fiela. For purposes of this paper the way in which she is portrayed by means of her speech, will be examined. In her speech, Fiela is depicted as the eternal matriarch, simple and unsophisticated - at times very uncouth - but proud and dignified. As an unsophisticated person, Fiela's speech naturally abounds with concretisations of abstract concepts, feelings and emotions in terms of familiar objects from her environment. As the expression of these concretisations takes place through idiosyncratic metaphorical constructions which manifest themselves as characterisation techniques, the interpretation of these metaphors is vital. In order therefore to assist the translation student in decoding the metaphorical expressions in a novel such as this, the following framework and terminology is provided.

3. FRAMEWORK AND TERMINOLOGY FOR THE ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF METAPHORICAL EXPRESSIONS IN NARRATIVE FICTION

Metaphoric language in poetic texts typically is characterised by a high degree of textual specification not accounted for in interaction views of metaphor dealing with local considerations only in the identification and interpretation of isolated metaphorical expressions. Gräbe (1984, 1985) therefore maintains that a consideration of global aspects in a textual analysis of metaphorical expressions is a prerequisite for an adequate understanding of the complex interaction processes that characterise poetic metaphor.

Global interaction strategies for the interpretation of poetic metaphor as developed by Gräbe (1984, 1985) can also be implemented to interpret (and accordingly translate) metaphorical expressions in narrative texts, on the assumption that metaphorical language has a communicative function in a novel: namely, that it determines the characterisation, both semantically and structurally. A global approach to the translation of metaphorical expressions in narrative fiction is therefore imperative (Kruger 1990).[5]

According to Gräbe (1984, 1985), there are two basic types of metaphorical construction. In these the focus is usually a verb or an adjective which serves to specify the content of a noun or nouns in the frame. The noun in the syntactic frame may therefore be described as an 'argument' (subject or object), modified or qualified by a focus. However, the focus of a metaphorical expression does not have to be restricted to a single word, since

an argument is often qualified by a 'focus expression' which can be a focal word, focal phrase or even a focal sentence. In the second type of construction two arguments interact and can be explicitly recognised as a tenor and a vehicle. However, according to Gräbe (1984, 1985) an explicit tenor-vehicle combination is rarely given in a syntactic unit in a poem and even when the tenor and vehicle are linked horizontally, they are textually specified.

The decoding processes for an isolated local metaphorical construction can be illustrated by means of the following example from Fiela se kind:

(1) Hulle het jou klaar hokgejaag, Fiela Komoetie ...
A FE
[= they have already chased you into a cage]

A = argument
FE = focus expression

In Gräbe's terminology (Gräbe 1984, 1985) the pronoun jou [= you] in (1) is the argument and the verb (het) hokgejaag [= have chased into a cage] is the focal phrase condensed within a composite focus expression. Because the focus expression here is complex, i.e. a noun hok [= cage] is hidden within the verbal focus (het) hokgejaag [= cage + chased], the composition of the focus expression has to be decoded before any interaction processes can be determined. In this case, hok [= cage], which conjures up connotations such as 'animal' and 'trapped', is semantically specified by the verb (het) gejaag [= chased] by invoking connotations such as 'driven' and 'forced'. Seen in isolation, it is literally possible to drive or force something into a cage. Now the local interaction process between the argument (jou) and its

qualifying focus expression (hokgejaag) can be decoded. Here jou is metaphorically qualified by hokgejaag, in other words, someone has been caged. This qualifying first function of focus expressions in relation to arguments in the syntactic frame is always and necessarily operative.

In some cases, however, the local interaction process between an argument and its qualifying focus expression requires the reconstruction of a second argument, which triggers implicit global interaction between arguments and focus expressions from different metaphorical constructions, resulting in global or paradigmatic interaction between tenors and vehicles in a text. The procedure for local interpretation of tenor and vehicle constructions therefore leads to a global interaction between both arguments and focus expressions from different metaphorical constructions. In Fiela se kind, characterisation is determined by the global interaction of metaphorically qualified arguments.

This second function of focus expressions can also be illustrated in terms of the example above. Owing to hok [= cage] being a noun, a second, submerged argument can be reconstructed, viz. dier [= animal], which may be combined with the focus expression in a literal sense and may moreover be related comparatively to the argument in question. The reconstruction of a submerged argument such as dier, prompted by the focus expression, allows for the reconstruction of a vehicle and as a result an implicit tenor-vehicle relation can be reconstructed:

(2) jy is (soos) 'n dier (in 'n hok)

[= you are (like) an animal (in a cage)]

= man is an animal
tenor vehicle

In (2) the relation between tenor and vehicle results in a nominal metaphor, similar to Black's (1962) Man is a wolf. However, although the structure might be similar, there is a vast difference between a lexicalised metaphor such as Man is a wolf and a 'novel' or literary metaphor such as 'Man is an animal' in (2) which interacts globally with other metaphorical expressions in this novel to determine a certain character trait of Fiela.

Once the local interaction processes between argument and focus expression and between tenor and vehicle (as well as their appropriate interpretative procedures) have been decoded in a complex metaphorical expression such as (1), it is possible to say that Fiela here experiences feelings of being trapped. She therefore compares herself to an animal that has been driven into a cage. The reason she feels this way, however, can only be explained globally.

When the immediate surroundings of the metaphorical expression Hulle het jou klaar hokgejaag are taken into account,[6] it becomes clear that here Fiela recalls a very traumatic experience in her life. She remembers that she felt as though she had no control over matters concerning her life; that "they" were closing in on her (hulle was haar aan die vaskeer). Like a dumb animal which had been driven into a cage, she could feel the gate being closed behind her (hulle pak nog net die opening toe). She feels threatened and therefore expresses her anxiety and fear in concrete terms by using

an image from her environment - that of an animal trapped in a cage. In this manner she expresses her feeling of total dehumanisation - she knows what the mother hen must have felt like "when the hawk hovered above her and there was no shelter to run to" (Matthee 1986:65).

All the idiosyncratic metaphorical expressions which manifest themselves in Fiela's speech reflect her rural environment, her experience of farmlife and her domestic activities. They form part of her subconscious awareness of life and can therefore be grouped together in the semantic paradigm 'farmlife' which comprises the tertium comparationis of the contrastive analysis in respect of Fiela's character trait as farmer or countrywoman. Hok [= cage] and dier [= animal] both interact with other arguments in the farmlife paradigm and are examples of how this character trait of Fiela is globally determined by associations and connotations conjured up by metaphorically qualified focus expressions throughout the text.

The translation of Hulle het jou klaar hokgejaag can now be studied in isolation and in context.

3. THE TRANSLATION OF IDIOSYNCRATIC METAPHORICAL EXPRESSIONS IN NARRATIVE FICTION

The metaphorical expression Hulle het jou klaar hokgejaag [= they have already chased/driven you into a cage] has been translated as They have you cornered already. This means that the source text metaphor has been substituted[7] by a lexical metaphor in the target text:

hokgejaag: 'in 'n hok dryf' [= drive into a cage]

'in 'n hoek dryf' [= drive into a corner] -> cornered

The fact that hokgejaag has been substituted by cornered shows that the translator did not consider the specificity of hok [= cage] as potential vehicle. Both functions of the focus expression have therefore been ignored. Although cornered conveys Fiela's sense of helplessness and invokes connotations of 'no escape' and 'being threatened', the concretisation of her (abstract) feelings, her dehumanisation and the disregard for her human dignity have become lost in the translation - which would not have been the case if Hulle het jou klaar hokgejaag had, for instance, been translated by They have you caged, Fiela.

Similar unsuccessful translations occur in the extracts preceding this example. Hulle was haar aan die vaskeer has been translated as They were driving her into a corner, which does not have the same meaning. Vaskeer means 'closing in on someone or something' not driving someone into a corner. Hulle pak nog net die opening toe, has been translated as What they are doing now is closing in on you, instead of something like 'they were already closing the opening/gate'. The extract about the mother hen, however, is completely acceptable.

If, as has happened in the case of hokgejaag and cornered, a metaphorical expression has been substituted for another that does not belong to the same semantic paradigm (e.g. hok belongs to the farmlife paradigm, corner as such does not), the global interaction between metaphorical constructions belonging to the farmlife paradigm gets disturbed by inconsistent translation. Therefore,

contrary to expectation, the idiosyncratic metaphorical expressions that manifest themselves in Fiela's speech in the translation do not reflect her environment and her central character trait as farmer and countrywoman. In other words, the characterisation technique by means of which her subconscious awareness of life was reflected in the original, was lost in the translation.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

It is clear that the translator (also the author) was not aware of the semantic potential of the idiosyncratic metaphors in the speech of her characters and did not take into account the different interaction processes necessary for decoding and interpreting metaphorical expressions in narrative texts. As a result, the qualifying function of focus expressions with regard to arguments in the syntactic frame, has been consistently neglected. The metaphorical expressions have nearly all been paraphrased[8] or omitted - very few expressions have been translated sensu stricto.[9] The translated text, i.e. Fiela's child (Matthee 1986), does therefore not succeed in its characterisation because the central communication technique of concretisation in terms of idiosyncratic metaphorical constructions, which forms an integral part of Dalene Matthee's literary style, is missing.

The conclusion can therefore be drawn that an inadequate translation of idiosyncratic metaphorical expressions has semantic and communicative implications for the target text. Not only does the target text lack the semantic density of the source text, but the loss of meaning which occurs in the translation adversely

affects the way in which the fictive characters are depicted by means of their speech. In turn, defective characterisation will, of necessity, negatively influence the reader's reception of the narrative text and the success of the translated novel as a literary work can be jeopardised.

Although the strategy developed here is illustrated by means of an Afrikaans novel, it could be implemented successfully in translation teaching programmes aimed at an objective, or at least a less subjective, assessment of the translation of various other features - not only idiosyncratic metaphorical expressions - of characters' speech in narrative fiction.

NOTES

1. The House model excludes literary source texts which necessitate overt translations. However, Knauer (1978) adapted the House model by adding a dimension of literary techniques to establish equivalence criteria for the analysis and interpretation of the novel as ST.

2. As developed by Genette (1980), Bal (1978) and Rimmon-Kenan (1983).

3. According to substitution views metaphors can be replaced by their literal meaning without loss of meaning; comparison views regard metaphors as similes from which the comparative element (like) has been deleted. In contrast, interaction theories maintain that the metaphorical word interacts with another lexical item or items and that the new meaning which is generated as a result of this interaction cannot be expressed in any other way than in a metaphor. (Cf. also Van Besien & Pelsmaekers 1988:140.)

4. Following Richards (1936), Black (1962) and Rheinhart (1976), Gräbe (1984, 1985) develops a framework and terminology for the analysis of interaction processes in poetic metaphor by redefining current terminology, modifying and extending local (syntactic) interpretative procedures and developing global (textual) interaction strategies.

5. Although a global (i.e. textual) approach is advocated in most recent discussions on the translation of metaphor, regrettably only isolated local examples are used in each instance, e.g. Van den

Broeck (1981), Mason (1982), Snell-Hornby (1988:56-64), Newmark (1981, 1988).

6. SOURCE TEXT

Hulle was haar aan die vaskeer. Sy het dit geweet ...

Hulle het jou klaar hokgejaag, Fiela Komoetie, het sy vir haarself gesê, hulle pak nog net die opening toe ...

Sy het geweet hoe die kloekhen voel as die valk in die lug hang en daar is geen skuilte vir haar om heen te vlug nie.

(Matthee 1985:48, 50)

TARGET TEXT

They were driving her into a corner. She knew it ...

They have you cornered already, Fiela Komoetie, she told herself. What they are doing now is closing in on you ...

She knew then what the mother hen felt like when the hawk hovered above her and there was no shelter to run to.

(Matthee 1986:63, 64, 65)

7. According to Van den Broeck (1981:77) substitution as mode of metaphor translation applies to those cases where the SL vehicle is replaced by a different TL vehicle with more or less the same tenor - then the SL and TL vehicles may be considered translation equivalents in that they share a common tenor.

8. According to Van den Broeck (1981:77) an SL metaphor is paraphrased whenever it is rendered by a non-metaphorical expression, by 'plain speech', in the TL.

9. According to Van den Broeck (1981:77) a metaphor is translated

sensu stricto whenever both tenor and vehicle of the ST metaphor are transferred into the TL.

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